

**Romney wins New Hampshire GOP presidential contest**  
**Reuters**  
**January 11 , 2012**

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire, Jan 11 — Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney yesterday won the New Hampshire Republican US presidential primary by a comfortable margin — his second straight victory in the race to become his party's choice to challenge Democratic President Barack Obama on November 6.

Mitt Romney accompanied by his wife Ann and their sons addresses supporters at his New Hampshire primary night rally in Manchester, January 10, 2012. — Reuters pic  
Based on early returns with about 10 per cent of the vote counted, US television networks declared Romney the victor. With about 15 per cent of the vote counted, the networks said Romney had won 36 per cent of the vote, with congressman Ron Paul in second with 25 per cent.

The New Hampshire primary is the second contest in the state-by-state battle for the Republican presidential nomination to face Obama. Romney narrowly won the first contest, the Iowa caucuses, on January 3 — by eight votes.

The former investment firm chief scored the clear victory despite rivals' fierce 11th-hour attacks painting him as a heartless corporate raider who enjoys cutting jobs. Romney's stint as a relatively moderate governor of neighbouring Massachusetts also sparked scepticism from conservatives.

Voters responded to Romney's claim that his private-sector experience would help him galvanize the weak US economy.

"I was looking for someone who is smart, knows our country, knows the financial system and how to get the country moving again with jobs," said Eddie Carr, a 77-year-old school bus driver. "I think it was right to vote for him. I think he can get the country going."

Paul, a congressman from Texas known for his libertarian views, beat out Jon Huntsman, a moderate former US ambassador to China, for second place in New Hampshire, the small New England state known for its independent streak and outsized role in presidential campaigns. Huntsman had about 17 per cent of the vote.

Romney became the first Republican who is not an incumbent president to win the first two early voting states, after his slim victory over former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum a week ago in the Iowa caucuses.

But he might face a bigger challenge in the next primary in South Carolina on January 21, where the economy is weaker and conservatives make up a larger slice of the electorate.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll yesterday showed Romney was way ahead of rival Republicans nationally, with 30 per cent support. He still trailed Obama by five points in the race to the White House. — Reuters

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/romney-strives-for-big-win-in-new-hampshire/>